

Message Text

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44

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BUENOS AIRES 6818

USCINCSO FOR POLAD

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, AR

SUBJECT: GOA SEARCHES FOR NEW LOOK

REF: A) BA-4894; B) BA-5001; C) BA-6625; D) BA-6628;

3) BA-6741

1. SUMMARY: AT A TIME WHEN THE MONTONEROS HAVE MOVED OVER TO ARMED OPPOSITION TO THE GOVERNMENT (SEE REF E) AND BOTH LEFT AND RIGHT-WING TERRORISM ARE INCREASINGLY ACTIVE, ONE ENCOURAGING ASPECT OF THE POLITICAL SCENE IS THAT THE CONSENSUS AT THE CENTER OF THE BODY POLITIC REMAINS INTACT. FURTHER, MRS. PERON, APPARENTLY URGED PRINCIPALLY BY RAUL LASTIRI AND ALBERTO ROCAMORE, IS TRYING TO GIVE HER GOVERNMENT A NEW LOOK BETTER GEARED TO THE NEEDS OF THAT CONSENSUS. SHE IS TRYING TO PREVENT ANY IMPRESSION OF VACUUM BY PUTTING HERSELF FORWARD AS A NEWLY DETERMINED LEADER. WHETHER SHE IS SUCH A LEADER OR NOT, MANY ARE BEGINNING TO BELIEVE HER WHEN SHE SAYS SHE IS, AND THAT IN ITSELF IS SIGNIFICANT. ALSO FORMING PART OF THE SUBTLE CHANGE IN THE COMPLEXION OF HER GOVERNMENT, LOPEZ REGA'S ROLE HAS BECOME COMPARATIVELY LESS PROMINENT WHILE THAT OF ALBERTO ROCAMORA HAS ADVANCED.

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THIS MAY BE A FACADE. EVEN SO, THE FACT THAT LOPEZ REGA IS

NO LONGER THE ALL-DOMINEERING FIGURE IN THE CABINET THAT HE WAS BEFORE ROCAMORA'S APPOINTMENT HAS IN ITSELF ASSUAGED SOMEWHAT THE OTHER SECTORS, ESPECIALLY THE UCR. WHETHER THE AMBITIOUS AND DURABLE LOPEZ REGA WILL BE CONTENT TO CUT LESS OF A FIGURE REMAINS TO BE SEEN. AND EVEN IF HE IS, THE SHIFT TOWARDS THE "OLD GUARD" AND STRENGTHENING THE DIALOGUE WITH THE OTHER SECTORS DOES NOT IN ITSELF SOLVE THE PRESSING PROBLEMS OF TERRORISM AND ECONOMIC MALAISE. IT DOES, HOWEVER, PUT MRS. PERON IN A SOMEWHAT MORE FAVORABLE POLITICAL POSITION TO COME TO GRIPS WITH THOSE PROBLEMS, IF SHE HAS THE WILL--AND THE STAMINA--TO DO SO. END SUMMARY.

2. AS SUGGESTED IN REF A, THE CENTER OF THE ARGENTINE POLITICAL EQUATION IS THE QUESTION OF WHETHER OR NOT MODERATE--CENTRIST CIVILIAN FORCES AND MILITARY CAN MAINTAIN CONSENSUS. IF THEY CAN RETAIN SUFFICIENT DEGREE OF COHESION, THEIR CHANCES OF CONTAINING TERRORIST THREAT, KEEPING ECONOMY AFLOAT AND WEATHERING THROUGH TO THE NEXT ELECTIONS WOULD BE MUCH INCREASED. AT THE EPICENTER OF THE EQUATION IS THE QUESTION OF UNITY OF THE PERONIST MOVEMENT ITSELF. IT REPRESENTS THE MAJORITY; SHOULD IT DISINTEGRATE INTO A NUMBER OF GROUPS WITHOUT ANY COMMON ALLEGIANCE, THERE WOULD BE NO STRONG CENTRAL CORE AROUND WHICH THE OTHER PARTIES AND INSTITUTIONS COULD COALESCE. IN OTHER WORDS, THE PROCESS OF CONSENSUS IS HEAVILY DEPENDENT ON THE GRAVITATIONAL PULL OF THE PERONIST MASS.

3. THERE HAS ALREADY BEEN SOME FRAGMENTATION OF THE PERONIST MOVEMENT. THE MONTONEROS, FOR EXAMPLE, HAVE NOW GONE OVER TO ARMED OPPOSITION TO THE GOVERNMENT. THE EXTREME RIGHT WING IS DRIFTING OFF IN THE OTHER DIRECTION. THE GREAT BULK OF PERONISTS, NONETHELESS, CONTINUE TO RECOGNIZE THE LEADERSHIP OF MRS. PERON AND ARE HANGING TOGETHER. LIKEWISE, MOST OTHER PARTIES AND INSTITUTIONS CONTINUE TO SEE DIALOGUE AND CONSENSUS POLITICS AS THE BEST HOPE FOR THE COUNTRY--ESPECIALLY IN THE FACE OF THE GROWING VIOLENCE WHICH SEEMS TO THREATEN THEM FROM BOTH LEFT AND RIGHT. AS MOST SEE IT, CONSENSUS IS THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE TO CHAOS ON THE ONE HAND OR A RETURN TO MILITARY RULE ON THE OTHER--I.E., TO THE FAILURES OF THE PAST. DESPITE THIS COLLECTIVE WILL OF THE MAJORITY TOWARDS A VIABLE NATIONAL UNITY, HOWEVER, THAT

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UNITY SEEMED THREATENED BY TWO FACTORS. FIRST, MRS. PERON, WHILE PERFORMING BETTER THAN MOST HAD EXPECTED, WAS FAILING TO PUT HERSELF ACROSS AS THE REAL PRESIDENT OF THE COUNTRY. SOMETHING OF A VACUUM, OR THE APPEARANCE OF ONE, WAS DEVELOPING, LEAVING THE RADICALS TO ASK, "WE WANT TO CONTINUE THE DIALOGUE, BUT WITH WHOM?" CERTAINLY NEITHER THEY NOR THE OTHER SECTORS WERE DISPOSED TO CONTINUE IT WITH LOPEZ REGA. SECONDLY, THE FIGURE OF LOPEZ REGA AND THE RISE OF THE PERONIST ULTRA-RIGHT WHICH HE

SEEMED TO SYMBOLIZE WERE ALSO CAUSING DEEPING DIVISIONS AMONG THE PERONISTS AND PERTURBING THE DIALOGUE WITH THE OTHER SECTORS. ALL MAJOR SECTORS WERE SO DETERMINED TO BACK MRS. PERON AS THE BEST SOLUTION THAT THEY WERE WILLING TO STOMACH LOPEZ REGA--TO A POINT. BY MID-AUGUST, HOWEVER, MANY BELIEVED HE WAS ON THE VERGE OF PASSING THAT POINT. HE HAD BECOME THE MOST PROMINENT FIGURE ON THE SCENE AND THE UCR AND OTHERS WERE REACHING THE CONCLUSION THAT HE WAS IN FACT THE POWER BEHIND THE THRONE. HENCE, THEY WERE BECOMING DISILLU-SIONED WITH MRS. PERON'S GOVERNMENT. AS ONE UCR SOURCE PUT IT: "THE COMMON THREAT FROM THE LEFT SHOULD HOLD THE PERONISTS AND THE UCR TOGETHER. BUT WHEN WE SAW WHAT SEEMED TO BE AN EQUALLY DANGEROUS THREAT FROM THE RIGHT RISING UP BEHIND THE PERSON OF LOPEZ REGA, OUR RATIONALE FOR STANDING WITH THE GOVERNMENT BECAME RATHER THIN."

4. CONSENSUS, THEN GAVE SIGNS OF BREAKING DOWN DIVISIONS WITHIN THE PERONIST MOVEMENT, MOREOVER, WERE WIDENING DANGEROUSLY, AS EVEN CENTRIST FORCES WERE REPELLED BY WHAT SEEMED TO BE THE GROWING DOMINANCE OF THE RIGHT WING. PESSIMISM WAS TAKING HOLD ON ALL SIDES. ESSENTIALLY, AS SUGGESTED IN BA-5001, IT SEEMED TO COME DOWN TO ONE CENTRAL ISSUE: MRS PERON HAD TO CURB LOPEZ REGA (OR GIVE THE IMPRESSION OF DOING SO) AND DEMONSTRATE MORE DECISIVE LEADERSHIP OR RISK LOSING SUPPORT.

5. ACCORDING TO RELIABLE PERONIST SOURCES, BY EARLY AUGUST MRS. PERON WAS FULLY COGNIZANT OF THE ABOVE STATE OF AFFAIRS AND BEGAN TO CAST ABOUT FOR A NEW LOOK FOR HER GOVERNMENT. SHE WAS ASSISTED IN FINDING ONE BY RAUL LASTIRI AND ALBERTO ROCAMORA (AND POSSIBLY OTHERS). ACCORDING TO RELIABLE SOURCES, IN A CLOSED MEETING WITH MRS. PERON AND LOPEZ REGA, LASTIRI AND ROCAMORA SMOOTHLY FINESSED THE QUESTION OF THE SOCIAL WELFARE MINISTER'S OVERLY PROMINENT ROLE BY SUGGESTING THAT HE WAS BECOMING TOO CONFIDENTIAL

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OBVIOUS A TARGET AND WAS RUNNING UNNECESSARY RISKS. FURTHER, THEY ARGUED, IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT HE WAS "MISUNDERSTOOD" BY THE RADICALES AND THAT IF GOVT WISHED TO MAINTAIN DIALOGUE WITH LATTER, LOPEZ REGA SHOULD ASSUME A SOMEWHAT LESS CONSPICUOUS ROLE--EVEN IF ONLY FOR PURPOSES OF CAMOUFLAGE.

6. CLEARLY, FANFARE ATTENDING APPOINTMENT OF ROCAMORA REPRESENTED FIRST STEP IN PROCESS OF BRINGING ABOUT SHIFTM SINCE AUG 13 HE HAS REPLACED OPEZ REGAN AT LEAST PUBLICLY, AS THE DOMINANT MEMNER OF THE CABINET. THIS HAS HAD A MARKED HEALING EFFECT. UCR SOURCES ARE NOW INDICATING THAT THEY AGAIN HAVE SOMEONE WITH WHOM THEY CAN DIALOGUE. ONE HIGH-RANKING UCR SOURCE RECENTLY INDICATED THAT HIS PARTY HAD GIVEN SOME SUPPORT TO GELBARD WHEN THEY SAW HIM AS THE ONLY STRONG OBSTACLE TO LOPEZ REGA. BUT NOW THAT ROCAMORA HAD BECOME THE OBVIOUS BULWARK

AGAINST LOPEZ REGIAMO THEIR SUPPORT FOR GELBARD WOULD DECLINE.
MILITARY AND MOST OTHER PARTIES ALSO PLANNED AND ENCOURAGED BY
ROLE ROCAMORA IS ASSUMING.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BUENOS AIRES 6818

7. QUESTION AS TO WHETHER THIS IS SIMPLY A FACADE BEHIND WHICH
LOPEZ REGA REMAINS THE KEY MANIPULATOR IS AN OPEN ONE. DOUBTLESS
LASTIRI AND ROCAMORA ASSURED HIM THAT NO MATTER WHAT THE
SURFACE APPEARANCES, HIS REAL POWER AND INFLUENCE WOULD
REMAIN UNDIMINISHED. ACCORDING TO SAME SOURCE AS PARA FIVE,
HOWEVER, THIS WAS SIMPLY SUBTLE TACTIC ON THEIR PART TO
LEVER HIM OFF CENTER STAGE WITHOUT GIVING OFFENSE. IN OTHER
WORDS, WHILE TELLING LOPEZ REGA THAT IT IS ONLY A MATTER OF
FORM, THEY IN FACT INTEND TO GIVE SUBSTANCE TO FORM. LOPEZ
REGA MAY NOT BE SO EASILY TAKEN IN. WHETHER OR NOT THEY
SUCCEED IN DOING SO, EVEN THE SIMPLE CHANGE IN OUTWARD APPEAR-
ANCES HAS HELPED THE SITUATION. ROCAMORA AND LASTIRI IN THE
FORWARD POSITIONS ARE ONE THING. LOPEZ REGA IS QUITE ANOTHER.
THEY ARE EMINENTLY PALATABLE TO THE OTHER SECTORS. HE IS NOT.

8. THE SECOND STEP IN THE PROCESS OF FASHIONING A NEW LOOK
WAS TO STRENGTHEN THE IMAGE--AND THE HAND--OF THE PRESIDENT.
THIS EFFORT WAS VERY APPARENT AT THE AUG 27-30 GOVERNORS
CONFERENCE--AND MOST ESPECIALLY SO IN THE NEW AND MORE FORCEFUL
STYLE IN WHICH MRS. PERON DELIVERED THE OPENING AND CLOSING
SPEECHES (SEE BA-6625). IT WAS APPARENT TOO IN MRS. PERON'S

DECISION TO NATIONALIZE PETROLEUM MARKETING FACILITIES. ECONOMICALLY, THIS MAY HAVE BEEN A MISTAKE. POLITICALLY, HOWEVER, IT MADE SENSE, APPEALING AS IT DID TO THE UCR AND TO NATIONALISTS
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OF ALL STRIPES. THE EFFORT TO MOLD A NEW IMAGE SEEMS TO BE PAYING OFF. THE EFFORT TO MOLD A NEW IMAGE SEEMS TO BE PAYING OFF. BOTH PERONIST AND NON-PERONIST POLITICIANS IN CONVERSATIONS WITH EMBOFFS DURING THE PAST WEEK TO TEN DAYS HAVE EXPRESSED SUPPORT FOR MRS. PERON WITH RENEWED ENTHUSIASM AND HOPE THAT SHE HAS WHAT IT TAKES TO PLAY HER ROLE SUCCESSFULLY.

9. BUT WHILE HER IMAGE HAS THUS BEEN IMPROVED, IT IS RECOGNIZED THAT AS A LEADER SHE IS NO GENERAL PERON; HENCE, SOME INSTITUTIONAL BOLSTERING MIGHT BE NECESSARY IF HER HAND IS TO BE STRENGTHENED. DESPITE ROCAMORA'S HALF-HEARTED DENIALS ON SEPT 2 AND 3, THERE IS NO QUESTION BUT THAT THE IDEA OF CREATING A PRIME MINISTERSHIP, OR, ALTERNATIVELY, A CHIEF OF CABINET, HAS BEEN UNDER ACTIVE CONSIDERATION. WELL-INFORMED PERONIST SOURCES HAD INDICATED THAT IF THE FIRST WERE CREATED, IT WOULD GO TO LASTIRI, IF THE SECOND, TO ROCAMORA. THOSE SAME SOURCES ARE NOW SAYING, HOWEVER, THAT THE CREATION OF A PRIME MINISTER'S SLOT HAS BEEN DEEMED UNFEASIBLE. IT MIGHT PROVE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE IN TERMS OF IMAGE. A CHIEF OF CABINET IS SOMETHING ELSE AGAIN. SUCH AN INNOVATION MIGHT HELP HER BETTER COORDINATE THE ACTIVITIES OF THE VARIOUS MINISTRIES AND SIMPLIFY THE CHAIN OF COMMAND, WITHOUT DETRACTING TOO MUCH FROM THE IMAGE OF THE PRESIDENCY ITSELF. FURTHER (AND THIS IS A POINT WHICH CLEARLY IS NOT LOST OF ROCAMORA AND LASTIRI), THE CREATION OF A CHIEF OF CABINET WOULD IMPLY A FURTHER REDUCTION TO LOPEZ REGA'S PERSONAL PUISSANCE, FOR THE FORMER WOULD DOUBTLESS TAKE SOME OF THE COORDINATING FUNCTION WHICH HAS HERETOFORE BELONGED TO THE LATTER.

10. IN THE OTHER PARTY RATHER THAN GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURE, ANOTHER INNOVATION WHICH MAY BE ADOPTED WITH A VIEW TO STRENGTHENING MRS. PERON'S POSITION IS THAT A SUPERIOR PERONIST COMMAND, REMINISCENT OF PERON'S STYLE OF RUNNING THE MOVEMENT IN THE FIFTIES. IT WOULD BE COMPOSED OF SOME FOUR TO FIVE MEMBERS AND LED BY MRS. PERON. LASTIRI, ROCAMORA, BRUNELLO AND ONE OR ANOTHER REPRESENTATIVE FROM THE LABOR WING ARE MOST FREQUENTLY MENTIONED AS LIKELY CANDIDATES--IF IN FACT THE COMMAND IS ACTUALLY BROUGHT INTO BEING. SIGNIFICANTLY, LOPEZ REGA'S NAME HAS NOT BEEN MENTIONED IN THIS CONNECTION.

11. IF THIS GOVERNMENT'S SEARCH FOR A NEW LOOK WAS DESIGNED
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AT LEAST IN PART TO PRESERVE THE CONSENSUS WITH THE OTHER SECTORS, NEITHER HAS THE GOVERNMENT OVERLOOKED A MORE DIRECT APPROACH. INITIALLY THE MULTIPARTY EFFORT TO PRODUCE A CONSENSUS OF VIEWS ON SOME BASIC GUIDELINES SEEMED TO BE A BRUNELLO INITIATIVE. BUT WITH THE SHIFT IN MRS. PERON'S TACTICS, THE ORTHODOX PERONISTS JOINED IN THE EFFORT AND HELPED TO PRODUCE THE SIXTEEN-POINT DOCUMENT WHICH WAS FINALLY PUBLISHED ON SEPT 3 (SEE BA-6628).

12. THE SUBTLE SHIFT AWAY FROM LOPEZ REGA AND TOWARDS THE PERONIST "OLD GUARD" (E.G., ROCAMORA, BENITEZ, OSELLA MUNOZ AND IVANISSEVICH) HAS ALSO SERVED TO COUNTER IN PART SOME OF THE DIVISIVE TENDENCIES WITHIN THE PERONIST MOVEMENT ITSELF, FOR IT HAS TURNED THE EMPHASIS TOWARDS THE CENTER, WHERE MOST PERONISTS RESIDE ON THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM; EMPHASIS ON THE RIGHT (OR THE LEFT), THEN, WOULD EVENTUALLY RESULT IN THE ALIENATION OF THE MAJORITY. THE EXTREME LEFT AND EXTREME RIGHT ARE BEGINNING TO SPLIT AWAY FROM THE MOVEMENT. IN THE MOVEMENT AS IN THE BODY POLITIC AS A WHOLE, HOWEVER, THE KEY INDICATOR IS NOT WHAT THE EXTREMISTS DO, BUT, RATHER, THE STATE OF UNITY AND CONFIDENCE OF THE CENTRIST MAJORITY.

13. TO SAY THAT LOPEZ REGA'S ROLE IS LESS PROMINENT NOW THAN A FEW WEEKS AGO IS NOT TO SAY THAT HE HAS BEEN SHOVED INTO THE BACKGROUND. HE HAS NOT. HE WAS AT MRS. PERON'S SIDE WHEN SHE DELIVERED HER SPEECH FROM THE BALCONY ON AUGUST 27 AND WILL DOUBTLESS CONTINUE TO BE ONE OF HER FOREMOST ADVISORS. NONETHELESS, THERE HAS BEEN A RELATIVE DECLINE IN HIS PROMINENCE AT THE SAME TIME THAT, ALMOST IN INVERSE PROPORTION, ROCAMORA'S STAR HAS RISEN. THIS SHIFT, AND MRS. PERON'S MORE FORCEFUL APPROACH TO THE PRESIDENCY, ARE WELCOME SIGNS. IN THEMSELVES THEY DO NOT IMPLY A SOLUTION TO THE HARDER PROBLEMS OF TERRORISM AND A FALTERING ECONOMY. THEY HAVE, HOWEVER, HELPED TO PRESERVE THE ALL IMPORTANT CONSENSUS (WHICH, AS SOME HAVE PUT IT, IS ABOUT ALL THE ARGENTINE POLITICAL SYSTEM HAS GOING FOR IT AT THE MOMENT) AND RESTORE CONFIDENCE IN THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION PROCESS. FURTHER, THERE IS SOME EVIDENCE THAT IN PUTTING FORWARD A MORE RESOLUTE IMAGE, MRS. PERON IS ACTUALLY BEGINNING TO FALL INTO THE ROLE. SHE APPEARS, FOR EXAMPLE, TO BE MOVING MORE RESOLUTELY AGAINST THE TERRORISTS. INDEED, BY ASSUMING A POSITION OF ARMED OPPOSITION TO HER GOVERNMENT, THE MONTONEROS MAY HAVE LEFT HER

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LITTLE CHOICE BUT TO MOVE VIGOROUSLY AGAINST THEM. AT THE VERY LEAST, HER POLITICAL MOVES OF THE PAST TWO OR THREE WEEKS HAVE INSPIRED SOME CONFIDENCE THAT, HER STAMINA PERMITTING, SHE IS UP TO THE TASK OF STEERING BETWEEN THE SCYLLA OF LEFT-WING TERRORISM AND

THE CHARYBDIS OF RIGHT-WING OVERREACTION. CONFIDENCE OR NOT, HOWEVER,
SHE STILL FACES A STAGGERING TASK.
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